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Race as Aesthetic: The Politics of Vision, Visibility, and Visuality in *Vogue* Italia's "A Black Issue"

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Author
Thompson Summers, Brandi

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Introduction

In July 2008, *Vogue* Italia, the least commercial of all *Vogue* editions, released "A Black Issue" (ABI) exclusively featuring black models as well as commentary on topics that would seemingly interest a black American audience (e.g., profiles of First Lady Michelle Obama, Spike Lee's film *Miracle at St. Anna*, and pieces about *Ebony* and *Essence* magazines). All of the images were photographed in the United States yet represented a global production of black beauty, using models from the United States, Europe, and Latin America; American and European photographers; and an Italian magazine using English headings and Italian text.

ABI quickly became the highest grossing issue of *Vogue* Italia. The first run of the July 2008 issue sold out in the United States and Britain, which led *Vogue* Italia to reprint several thousand copies for American and British audiences–it did not sell particularly well in Italy. This was the first time a Condé Nast magazine was reprinted to satisfy high demand. The issue provoked multiple conversations online and in print on the topic of race and racism in the fashion industry. Those who celebrated the issue praised its focus on positive representations in a world that so easily attaches to negative and stereotypical depictions of black women. In particular, the

magazine was heralded for shining a spotlight on the notion that beauty comes in various colors, shapes, and sizes.[1] ABI also sparked controversy among detractors who spoke against the issue's tokenism, which could be seen as a way to overlook the lack of diversity in the high fashion industry.

While *Vogue* Italia is widely known for being edgy and controversial, often making overtly political statements about a variety of pertinent social, political, and cultural issues worldwide, the magazine's editor, the late Franca Sozzani, was inspired to produce "A Black Issue" after noticing the overwhelming racial homogeneity of fashion runways. She explained, "I decided to do an issue only with black girls. People say, 'It's a ghetto.' But we do thousands of issues with Russian girls and it's not a ghetto."[2] After the release of ABI, several media outlets featured stories about and interviews with Sozzani who credited the successes of Oprah Winfrey and President Barack Obama for her growing interest in promoting and supporting black models and designers.[3] Sozzani's inspiration from two prominent black figures, the magazine issue's presentation of interest pieces targeting an American audience (e.g., highlighting American film, publications, celebrities, etc.), ushered in questions about the meaning, significance, and circulation of blackness in the twenty-first century onto the global stage.

In what follows, this article shows how the visibility of blackness functions within an elite fashion space to both distance us from an understanding of racial inequality and at the same time satisfy contemporary

demands for diversity. Furthermore, the article explores the ways in which blackness has become depoliticized as an aesthetic category, rather than an identity category, as the result of post-racial visual discourse. Desire for a post-racial America, presumably signaled by the election of President Obama, provokes more global attention to blackness. While the post-racial ideal attempts to minimize the significance of race in daily life, it also gives us permission to play with it. Within this purported post-racial context, where one's racial identity does not hinder their success, blackness is disarticulated from its oppressive history, and is instead used as a site to celebrate difference. In a post-racial world, racism is rendered invisible and unsayable, since we have moved beyond racial hierarchy, oppression and, privilege into an environment in which race neither matters, nor in some cases, exists. Acknowledging the body as the central trope of the fashion system, I consider Foucault's assertion that the body is a site for the articulation of power relations, therefore examining the high fashion industry requires me to not only study black bodies, but also look at fashion as a discourse itself.

Publication of ABI took place amid increasing calls for the addition of more black models on the runway and in high fashion magazines. However, this form of "image activism" focuses on diversity and inclusion based on individual models being added to rosters rather than addressing the structural conditions that have historically kept black models out of the fashion system.[4] Where image activism and the black issue of *Vogue* Italia

had the potential to queer hegemonic, heteronormative conventions and standards of beauty, representations of the black models in ABI present the "glamorous" black model's body as unthreatening, alluring, and integrated into dominant discourses of (white) feminine attractiveness. By "queer" I refer to a form of critical engagement used to challenge heteronormative and established conceptions of beauty. Other scholars have written about the multiple ways in which black bodies queer beauty standards through various practices and embodiments.[5] In a similar context, Sharon Holland, provides critical intervention into feminist and queer studies by accounting for the relationship between desire and everyday acts of racism, thereby problematizing the erasure of race when queerness and feminism are thought together.[6] I argue that in its celebration of black beauty, "A Black Issue" re-inscribes heteronormative conceptions of black femininity and the black female body that circulates within the high fashion industry, including those that mimic white beauty standards.

This article features a combined analysis of image activism in the fashion industry that calls for the representation of black models through the visible inclusion of more black bodies on the runway and in magazines, and a textual/image analysis of "A Black Issue." In my image analysis, I focus on the presentation of black female bodies through their clothing, facial expressions, physical disposition, spatial organization, and association with other elements in the frame. I use these cues to extract visual discourses of race as they are presented on the pages of "A Black Issue." I highlight the

construction of black bodies as valuable in the fashion system as a mark of difference and evidence of diversity. Cultural history plays no part in the representation of black models on the runways and in magazines. In fact, what matters is the visual display of racial difference – or how Suzy Menkes' describes in her *New York Times* review "the joy of seeing a sea of black faces."[7] I also analyze the high fashion industry as a site of conflicting elements concerning the deployment and meaning of the black female body. I propose queer worldmaking as a lens to understand the limits of this brand of diversity and inclusion in the fashion industry. In particular, I find Roderick Ferguson's queer of color critique to be a useful analytic to consider the ways in which image activism, the *Vogue* Italia black issue, and other efforts to achieve diversity and inclusion in high fashion fail to challenge heteronormative notions of desire, femininity, and blackness. To that end, the article concludes with a brief discussion about the February 2014 New York Fashion Week show put on by luxury streetwear label, Hood By Air, as it unveils and disrupts heteronormativity through its presentation of queer fashioned bodies.

In *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Roderick Ferguson interrogates the juncture of queer theory, Marxism, African American literary criticism, and women of color feminism as he theorizes a queer of color analysis. He defines queer of color analysis as that which "interrogates social formations at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, with particular interest in how those formations

correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices."[8] In particular, he argues against the notion that race, gender, sexuality, and class are isolated formations. Ferguson's formulation critiques how racial, gendered, classed and sexual practices work alongside the normative and disciplining practices of the modern state and capitalism. He challenges historical materialism and identifies how Marxism not only universalizes heteronormativity, but that racialization under capitalism naturalizes heteropatriarchy. Ultimately, Ferguson argues that a queer of color analysis requires a challenge to the ways in which capital produces and regulates emergent social formations. Just as Ferguson identifies the sociological canon as complicit in joining with state forces to discipline traditionally excluded group, the fashion industry engages in similar play. While *Vogue* Italia, despite its lauded efforts for which the fashion industry takes credit as a historic magazine issue, presents a view of blackness, picturing the black female body, and black female desirability in a way that reinforces a heteronormative black femininity. It is this construction of the black female body, disciplined by fashion norms, that presents blackness as marketable in a high fashion space. Image activists call for the inclusion of more black models into the fabric of the fashion aesthetic, and it is within and in response to this social and political climate that ABI was produced– highlighting the productive capacities of power. While campaigns against racism have been fundamental to uncovering a largely taboo subject in fashion, by emphasizing the need for representation in the form of visible,

recognizable black female bodies, image activists limited the effects of resistance against practices of racism that aided in the hegemony of heteropatriarchy in the fashion industry since ABI's embrace of black difference worked to consolidate abstract racial justice.

Re-Politicization of the Black Image in High Fashion

By the mid- to late-2000s, various controversies arose in the high fashion industry over the form, function, and labor of women's bodies. Protests emerged online and in print lamenting the need for difference and diversity in two specific ways: size diversity and racial/ethnic diversity. In early 2007, during the Spring/Summer season of fashion weeks across the globe, designers and fashion editors experienced increasing pressure to avoid "superskinny" models on their runways an in photoshoots. While some designers embraced guidelines for the hiring of models, most designers resisted regulation and vowed not to make changes to the way they select models. Fashion veterans like Karl Lagerfeld responded to the effort to regulate model-hiring by calling it "politically correct fascism."[9] Others like Vera Wang expressed disappointment that "civilians" were adopting fashion standards, thus highlighting a clear distinction between high fashion as art in opposition to pure commercial consumption. Echoing this sentiment, Angela Missoni argued that models have been tall and thin since the 1940s "because professions that imply the use of your body apply different rules – from the training of astronauts to the bodies of sumo fighters."[10] In contrast

to this position, *New York Times* fashion columnist Guy Trebay writes, "[v]ast numbers of consumers draw their information about fashion and identity from runways, along with cues about what, at any given moment, the culture decrees are the new contours of beauty and style."[11] In this way, the visual and textual language of fashion carries significant power in determining the aesthetic value of everyday individuals.

On the topic of racial diversity, questions of race specifically sparked debates about the representation of black models in high fashion. In October 2007, Trebay wrote a provocative piece in *The New York Times* titled "Ignoring Diversity, Runways Fade to White," in which he highlighted the gross numeric inequalities between white models and models of color (specifically black models) on the runway. In the article, Trebay surmised that the fashion industry is in direct conflict with the social climate of the United States, where "Oprah is the most powerful woman in media" and at the time, "Barack Obama [was] running for president."[12] Several image activists (primarily black current and former models, stylists, photographers, and designers) denounced the hostile conditions that perpetuated the continued invisibility of black models on the runway and in elite fashion magazines, yet few discuss the intersection of race and gender in the production of fashion. Using an intersectional analysis exploring these constructions of race, gender, and sexuality exposes the structural conditions shaping the "look" of the industry and, how ABI is produced within

a capitalist system that re-inscribes and makes legible heteronormative representations of difference.

Explanations for the dearth of black models in editorial high fashion have been framed in three specific ways. First, fashion tastemakers (bookers, editors, stylists, photographers) discriminate against black models, in some cases, openly.[13] For example, until 2006, bookers explicitly denied consideration of black models by sending notices to agents that "no blacks/ethnics" were to be considered for some shoots and runway shows. In this case, the exclusion of black models is not a systemic issue but rather personal bias against blackness and black women that hinders the fashion industry's quest for racial inclusiveness and diversity. Secondly, the decision to exclude black models represents a designer's exercise of aesthetic choice and/or creative freedom.[14] Designers eschew the "racist" label, suggesting that their decision to include or exclude models of color is simply based on their freedom to choose a color palette based on their aesthetic vision for the season, rather than any political or social considerations—namely race. Elizabeth Wissinger writes: "When designers cater to their 'creative flow,' if they tend not to select black models it is because they do not fit the 'color scheme' of their aesthetic vision. Yet in response to designer Diane von Furstenburg's exclusive use of black fashion models for a runway show, appeals to aesthetics were pushed aside by political concerns."[15] In other words, attention to race devalues the creative aspects of the work, while at

the same time, attention to race satisfies liberal demands for visible representation and inclusion.

Finally, bookers, photographers, and other image-makers justify the exclusion of black women because they proclaim their inability to find a suitable pool of qualified talent. The black female body is constructed as physically deviant and problematic, and as Ashley Mears finds, ethnic, or in this case, blackness, rarely signals "high end."[16] In fact, Mears argues that stereotypes guide aesthetic decisions. In conversation with Mears, a former fashion model, some bookers lament:

> 'A lot of black girls have got very wide noses…The rest of her face is flat, therefore, in a flat image, your nose, it broadens in a photograph. It's already wide, it looks humongous in the photograph. I think that's, there's an element of that, a lot of very beautiful black girls are moved out by their noses, some of them.'

> 'But it's also really hard to scout a good black girl. Because they have to have the right nose and the right bottom. Most black girls have wide noses and big bottoms so if you can find that right body and that right face, but it's hard.'[17]

When black models do appear in editorial spaces, they must inhabit a "high-end ethnic" look that follows the norms of white beauty, like a "white woman dipped in chocolate," or an "exotic" look, where the black model has very dark skin.[18] These justifications point to the ways in which participation and

access are explained away by market considerations, individual choice, and/or cultural deficiency. Arguments about regulating the social conscience of the fashion industry emphasize both a commercial imperative as well as an aesthetic need for choice and aesthetic freedom thus fitting squarely within a broader neoliberal framework, which deploys market logic as a way to protect and promote social equality and individual liberties.

Rather than recognizing the absence of black models in the high fashion industry as part of the structural conditions of fashion aesthetics (black models are not included because power has constructed various modes of aesthetics to recognize blackness as aberrant), their exclusion is framed seemingly as a disjuncture between social responsibility and aesthetic freedom/choice In reference to the lack of diversity on the runway, fashion writer Robin Givhan said in a *New York Magazine* interview that a significant change in the racial makeup of runway shows has not occurred because:

> we're talking about integrating the runways in a way that is less dependent on an aesthetic mood for a season and more on a moral obligation. I think if you look back at history you realize that those sorts of changes that are rooted in morality have not happened out of the goodness of people's hearts.[19]

Givhan suggests that change will only occur through political and economic pressures from outside the industry, thus bridging the tension between both art and commerce and art and politics – pressures that can impact the

aesthetic culture of fashion. Nevertheless, in their attempts to maintain their pursuit of creative freedom, designers argue that the value of their creations are directly related to the extent to which they are unburdened by the limits of political correctness.[20] Fashion designers' attempt to separate aesthetics from culture is quite an astute strategy to forestall political responsibility (or as Givhan sees it, a moral obligation), in favor of aesthetic preference. Ultimately for fashion tastemakers, where inclusion is deemed political (and not aesthetic), exclusion is understood as aesthetic (not political). *Vogue* Italia's "A Black Issue" attempted to address this issue by making a social and political intervention, through its inclusion of more black models. Nevertheless, ABI presented images of black models within a fashion system that privileges and values representations of white heteronormative beauty standards, thereby making their blackness an aesthetic matter rather than the political one the issue sought to address.

Out of Favor/Out of Fashion: Bethann Hardison and the Quest for Black Female Inclusion

In September 2007, former model and agent Bethann Hardison moderated a press/invitation-only symposium called "The Lack of the Black Image in Fashion Today" at the Bryant Park Hotel Screening Room in New York City. The event featured an exclusive group of top models and designers including Iman, Naomi Campbell, Tyson Beckford, Liya Kebede, and Tracy Reese. According to Hardison, the purpose of the event was to

“raise consciousness and take responsibility” for the lack of exposure and to unify powerful members of the fashion community to end the exclusion many black models faced.[21] Participants discussed why black models have been absent on the runway over the past several years and concluded that the dearth of black models on the runway and in magazines resulted from discriminatory employment practices. Furthermore, they concluded that despite claims to the contrary, racism, not economic considerations, drove the exclusion of black models in the fashion industry since, according to Targetmarketnews.com, black women’s spending power is estimated at $20 billion. But as fashion writer Robin Givhan suggests, designers do not view black women as their customers.[22] In fact, as Kenya Hunt reports the concept “of being ‘right now’ exceeds social responsibility. Few view race within the context of diversity” – instead they see it as an aesthetic issue.[23] In other words, the inclusion of Black models is based primarily on the decision to visually present blackness in ways that fulfill an aesthetic desire, rather than a political or social one.

Because of the common myth that “black models don’t sell,” echoing the sentiment that black models do not adequately reflect or represent “high end” or luxury, fashion magazine editors maintain the practice of excluding black models from the covers of their magazines. Jourdan Dunn, a popular black British model calls such practices “lazy” since there is no real evidence that such claims are true.[24] However, as Ashley Mears and Joanne Entwistle show, editorial magazines base their decisions not on market demands, but

on “taste.” The editorial fashion space utilizes a different organizing logic than commercial fashion. In editorial fashion, race and other social considerations become ancillary to fundamental creative, aesthetic production of art – fashion producers simply make “aesthetic choices.”[25] Editorial fashion tastemakers are not bound to considerations of the buying public, like in commercial fashion where consumer demographics play a significant role in the selection and representation of models. In other words, editorial fashion is purportedly an elite site that is resistant to basic consumer and economic market pressures.[26] Instead of a purely economically-based market, there is an aesthetic economy that guides decision-making in fashion.[27] Therefore, determining that black models are not valuable enough to appear on fashion magazine covers is both a question of economics and of aesthetics.

Bethann Hardison’s quest for the inclusion of Black models did not begin with this first symposium in 2007. In fact, in 1992, after her 1988 founding of Black Girls Coalition (BGC), the BGC held a widely-publicized press conference where Hardison confronted the fashion industry about the lack of models of color in advertising campaigns, despite the significant purchasing power of black, Asian, and Latinx communities. The 1980s saw an increase in the models featured in magazines and even on covers like Naomi Campbell, who was the first black woman on the cover of French *Vogue*, however the numbers of black models, in particular, remained low in editorial images.[28]

Hardison's second and most publicized forum, "Out of Fashion: Absence of Color" was held a month later in October 2007 at the New York Public Library. With the industry still buzzing from New York Fashion Week in September, this time the event was open to the public and allowed approximately 200 people. This conversation featured a roundtable that included a diverse sampling heavyweights from various fields within the fashion industry: stylist and consultant, Lori Goldstein; former model and agent, David Ralph; casting director, James Scully; designer, Tracy Reese; and Hardison. Prior to introducing the panel, Hardison stood at the podium and listed her ten "peeves": 1) oftentimes, image makers don't have an "eye" to locate black beauty; 2) deciding one top working girl of color is sufficient; 3) hearing the statement that "black covers don't sell;" 4) black models having to compete against each other and being encouraged to do so by their reps; 5) model reps saying "I already have a black model or two;" 6) fashion designers not feeling self-conscious about their lack of diversity; 7) image makers not making a conscious effort to demand black images continually; 8) model agencies keeping black models from being in black magazines; 9) making it hard for agencies to get black models where agents lose their drive; and 10) celebrity blacks coming into fashion industry in their nouveau riche style, not recognizing the problem, just enjoying the lights and media acceptance. Hardison's "peeves" effectively highlight racial insensitivity and inequities in the fashion industry, however they do not call attention to the inherent limits of an elite fashion system built to privilege

white, heteronormative, upper-class notions of beauty. Instead, this line of critique suggests that the fashion decision-makers are racist and fail to recognize black beauty. To ameliorate Hardison's concerns, image makers could simply incorporate more black models in magazines to aesthetically complement the work that is already being done. These arguments fail to interrogate the strictures of race, gender, class, and sexual inequalities that deeply embed the fashion system.

Although the conversation began with Hardison's nuanced critique of the industry and its exclusion of black models, several of the themes that arose during the roundtable deflected questions of race. In an effort to display race neutrality, fashion industry tastemakers rely on ambiguous terms to avoid a direct reference to race. Lori Goldstein claimed that fashion shows are more rhythmic, mechanical, and homogenized today. She suggested that this change has nothing to do with the color of a model's skin, that designers are not necessarily looking for white models, instead "They are looking for strong girls that walk very strong, or they are looking for a 'Prada-esque' girls that get lost in the clothes… every designer has a vision. It's more about the type of the personality of the girl and not the color of their skin." To say that designers, stylists, bookers, are looking for models with "personality," "character," or "strong girls," allows them to avoid a discussion of race or explain how race plays a role in production and decision-making in editorial fashion. African American designer, Tracy

Reese, suggested that “laziness” was the culprit driving designers to exclude models of color. She said, designers are

> not thinking about the world or the diversity of their customer base – how to complement and accentuate different types of women. And I think it’s lazy and not modern…Every designer who thinks they’re modern and cutting edge…Is it modern to discriminate on your runway? We have a broad audience that we are selling to…To not address that on the runway is so old-fashioned.

It is the deployment of such seemingly race-neutral cues like “personality” and “laziness” that shift the frame from an anxiety over the absence of the black female body in high fashion to a simple recalibration of public visibility. On the other hand, Reese evokes the civil rights language of “discrimination” to chide designers for excluding black models. Nevertheless, as Tracy Reese’s comments suggest, the explicit visible recognition and representation of blackness is part of a historical shift that posits attention to blackness and diversity as worthy, marketable, and fiscally responsible.

Hardison’s third symposium of the series was held on January 23, 2008 at the Bowery Hotel in New York City – only a couple of weeks before New York fashion week began. This final gathering had the largest turnout with about 275 guests (designers, editors, models, agents, journalists, etc.). Prior to this open forum, Hardison sat down with a group of influential African American women: *The Washington Post*’s fashion editor Robin Givhan, *The Wall Street Journal*’s fashion editor Teri Agins, *Essence Magazine*’s fashion

director Agnes Cammock, The Studio Museum's Thelma Golden, and Barneys New York's Dawn Brown, to discuss details about the forum.[29] At the event, Hardison rehashed several of the arguments she raised at the previous forum and invited audience members to approach the microphone and speak about the invisibility of black models in fashion. She also read a note aloud from *Vogue*'s Andre Leon Talley, who was unable to attend the event due to his prior commitment to the Obama presidential campaign, in which he conceded that the "first thing to do is to accept the issue as a reality."[30]

By the time Hardison hosted her first 2007 event, the topic of diversity in high fashion had been written about at length by *Women's Wear Daily* (WWD), but the issue of diversity in high fashion was also picked up by various global news sources including *The Washington Post, The New York Times, Le Monde, The Guardian, The Independent,* and *The Telegraph* as fashion weeks roared on in major cities. Fashion websites and blogs like style.com, models.com, jezebel.com, fashionista.com and publications like *WWD* began surveying the number of models of color used in runway shows and on fashion magazine covers to highlight the lack of diversity that continues to plague that fashion industry.

Despite their efforts to cope with the invisibility of black models by highlighting disparities in racial representation in high fashion, framing the terms of black exclusion as a problem of representation and the practice of counting the number of non-white bodies on the runway only supports the expectation that "representation itself will solve the problem of the black

body in the field of vision."[31] Calls for inclusion, like those of diversity, invoke benign discourses that obscure power, history, and capital. The trope of invisibility understood in conjunction with demands for recognition, creates "an equivalence between political empowerment and public visibility."[32] Older conceptions of representation were best applied when racism was inscribed in the law. To increase the number of black models on the runway satisfies a current market demand rather than shifting or re-imagining the meaning of the black female body in fashion. Counting and cataloguing models of color cannot effectively dismantle an unjust system that identifies black models as aberrant, and thereby invokes an aesthetic approach to equality.

The practice of linking race to aesthetics and visual/visible difference operates as a mechanism of power, one that not only provides the language to exclude black models (e.g., most black models are unqualified, the mere mention of race devalues creativity, etc.) but also organizes the terms that activists use to combat these kinds of statements. Again, the terms by which Hardison, et. al., frame the invisibility of black models opened the door for the production of "A Black Issue," *Vogue* Italia's explicit investment in the novelty of blackness as difference, to be the high fashion industry's perfect strategic response. Furthermore, the productive possibilities of this marriage between race and aesthetics enables and encourages the notion that a magazine issue intended to celebrate blackness is evidence of the hegemonic conditions being challenged and overthrown. As Kobena Mercer

explains, cultural difference has been “made highly visible as the sign of a ‘progressive’ disposition, but radical difference was gradually detached from the political or moral claims once made in its name.”[33] In this way, the fashion industry uses diversity and representation as strategy to manage real opposition and material change.

A Black Issue

Having identified the historical and political conditions under which the *Vogue* Italia “All Black Issue” was produced, I use the remaining part of this essay to provide an analysis of several of the editorial spreads featured in the issue. Blackness has operated as a longstanding boundary for white identity, culture, and values. Deborah Willis and Carla Williams provide a compelling and thorough account of how image technologies shape our vision/version of the world and all of its inhabitants.[34] They offer three categories to distinguish the visual and historical representations of the black female form: the naked black female (“National Geographic” or “Jezebel” aesthetic), the neutered black female (mammy), and the noble black female (noble savage). Together, these well-rehearsed tropes have contributed to the over-eroticization of, and colonizing voyeurism toward black female bodies, specifically in relation to the white female form. They have been instrumental in reproducing normative black femininity as excessive, hypersexual, and productive, especially in the service of capital.[35] It is through the circulation of these tropes that the black female body is

constituted as a discursive space for various inscriptions of value, legibility, and visibility. “A Black Issue” expands the range of representations identified by Williams and Willis to include representations of the models as hyperblack (saturated with color) and “high end ethnic,” as Ashley Mears theorizes, in order to make these black models beautiful, desirable, and marketable. Considering the West’s particularly long history of representing the black female body in image, the following analysis will highlight the multiple meanings of blackness produced through the visual presentation of black female bodies.

<Figure 1 here>

The issue, which featured four different covers with four different models individually gracing each cover (Naomi Campbell, Jourdan Dunn, Liya Kebede, and Sessilee Lopez), provided a diverse sampling of editorial spreads. These spreads, adapted by Ghanaian fashion stylist Edward Enninful, included a “Beauty” pictorial; “Modern Luxe,” a photographic tribute and accompanying article about black high fashion models of the past and present; “There’s Only One Naomi,” an extravagant spread devoted solely to iconic model, Naomi Campbell; and “Champagne Furs,” an editorial spread featuring Toccara Jones, a plus-sized model who was first introduced as a contestant on Tyra Banks’s wildly successful reality TV show “America’s Next Top Model,” in fur garments and black lingerie. There has not been an all-black model issue of *Vogue* Italia or any other high fashion magazine

since the original, however several global fashion magazines have featured either all-black spreads or black cover models over the past five years.[36]

Despite an increasing number of black bodies presented in film, television, and other forms of media to satisfy liberal demands for diversity and racial inclusion, "*seeing black is always a problem in a visual field that structures the troubling presence of blackness.*"[37] Nevertheless, photographer Steven Meisel is heralded for his creative ability to "extract" the beauty of his models. The images of Lopez and Banks resemble classic beauty shots, or headshots, that are most often used for cosmetics or hair advertisements (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). These poses are popular in commercial advertising because the camera not only showcases the intended product, but the viewer is also drawn to the model's face. Because black women have historically been produced through visual signs as in excess of idealized white femininity, the presentation of Tyra Banks and Sessilee Lopez as "beautiful" demonstrates progress, notwithstanding the necessity of Meisel's skill to re-present them.

On one hand, the disavowal of race comes to light in terms of the definition of beauty – that black can now stand in for beauty where beauty was previously understood in terms of its proximity to whiteness. On the other hand, the experience of seeing these women for the first time highlights what bell hooks observes as the mark of privilege since "most white people do not have to 'see' black people." Despite the increase in black bodies in popular culture, because whites are most consistently on

display in film, magazines, television, etc., “they can live as though black people are invisible.”[38]

<Figure 2 and 3 here>

The “newness” of black beauty is also reinforced in the magazine’s text. For example, as a way to explicate the prominent use of black fabric on the models, the text accompanying the four-page “Black on Black” spread reads: “Dramatization of the former little black dress! The black color enhances the most sensational new black beauty” (*“Drammatizzazione dell’ex-Little Black Dress! Il nero più colori esalta la nuova sensational Black Beauty”)*. Again, blackness must be identified, not only in image, but also in text in order to engage the reader in the practice of linking blackness as race to blackness as aesthetic. The term “Black Beauty” – referencing the black models, is presented as a recognizable, fully-formed concept, like “Little Black Dress” – both written in English amid Italian text. Race and difference become legible aesthetically as color – the blackness of the bodies is equivalent to the blackness of the dress and darkness of the lighting – and is the perfect accessory that can adorn even the black body. Therefore, we see both the reinforcement and disavowal of black difference. Blackness as difference as color enhances the fashion spread since difference is seductive. The repetition of the color black (in text, on fabric, and on the skin) directs our attention to race as an aesthetic.

<Figure 4 here>

In the “Beauty” spread, again the photographer uses this opportunity to play with the code “black” as a marker of both the bodies and the fabric color. The geometric and animated spread features Chanel Iman in various poses portraying an abstract, futuristic, perhaps post-racial, reference to blackness. In this spread, we see a literal recycling of blackness through the symbolic links of the color black (as paint) and the black body (see Figure 4 and 5). Here, the black coating on Iman’s face endows and enhances her with a particular aesthetic value to match the commercial value to she has in the market as a black fashion model. As Patricia A. Turner suggests, beauty in fashion is difficult to regulate, and specifically with black models “part of the problem is that their complexions become part of the fashion…It’s part of what’s worn, in the same way as shoes or hats.”[39] These images signify the artistic/aesthetic link between the color black and the cultural meaning of blackness in relation to the production of subjects. On the other hand, the image disavows and decontextualizes her blackened face from the racial history of blackface,[40] thus commodifying black as a marketable aesthetic.

<Figure 5 and 6 here>

The over-exposure of blackness in Chanel Iman’s “Beauty” spread refers to what W.T. Lhamon calls “optic black.” Optic blackness, according to Lhamon, is derogatory cultural imagery, created by whites and endorsed by blacks, as a form of social criticism that highlights the “refusal” of blacks to “fit.” Optic blackness is ultimately the performance of the excessive visibility of blackness. The commendation of this imagery by whites is to

visually display their refusal to fit in.[41] Therefore, as discussed above, it is through the literal and excessive repetition of "black" (vis-à-vis black bodies, black paint, and "black" in text), that the black female subject becomes visible in this space.

Spreads like "Elegance as Form" and "How to Dazzle" rely upon a muted color palette. In both spreads, the models primarily wore black clothes, while the classic styling of the models and elegance of the garments matched the minimalist background setting. The images in both shoots make clear nostalgic references to the history of fashion photography's past, including the works of Horst P. Horst, Richard Avedon, and Irving Penn, whose shots were regularly featured in *Vogue* magazines in the early and mid-twentieth century. Meisel's use of dimmed light, minimally decorated (if not barren) white sets, a focus on shape and form, and his use of black and white exposure speaks directly to these classic photographers. Meisel mimics the apparent simplicity of Irving Penn's compositions, which concealed a formal complexity resulting from the particular elegance of the model's outline, of the abstract interplay of lines and shapes, and of empty and filled space. While Penn's "models and portrait subjects were never seen leaping or running or turning themselves into blurs," Richard Avedon often captured "alive moments," in which models were photographed in motion (leaping in the air, walking, running, etc.), as Horst P. Horst is known for using carefully crafted sets that incorporated shadows cast by the models, making them an important part of his composition.[42]

Meisel engages in the mimetic practice of re-inserting black female bodies into nostalgic narratives of American glamour, rewriting fashion history as inclusive and ignoring the implications of race and the social relations of a past that excluded or minimized the visual presence of black bodies in high fashion. It is through this representation of the black models' bodies as glamorous that the "bourgeois ideal of femininity as a symbol of racial inclusiveness" comes alive.[43] Since glamour(ous) is a characteristic most often attributed to white women, the bodies of these black models are disciplined by their insertion into a glamorous space that was previously occupied by white models. Therefore, whiteness is produced and made anew through this exchange. Ashley Mears maintains that glamour works through disguise. Derived from the Celtic term "glamer," which is a talisman or magic spell "that is cast to blur the eyes and make objects appear different from, and usually better than, their true nature," the glamour displayed in these spreads produces the beauty of these black bodies as equal to those of white models.[44]

<Figure 7 and Figure 8 here>

On the other hand, one of the images featuring Sesilee Lopez resembles an April 1965 photograph of Donyale Luna (née Peggy Ann Freeman) shot by Richard Avedon for *Harper's Bazaar*. Luna is styled in leopard and her body is positioned like a jungle cat as her hands are formed into claws. In Meisel's reproduction, Lopez wears leopard print and leaps in the air with her mouth agape, exposing her teeth, as if she is growling. Her

"claws" are up in a defensive stance. Both images highlight what Janice Cheddie argues is the "imagining of the black body as a signifier, often simultaneously, of the modern (glamor) and the primitive."[45] Similarly, Judith Brown argues that Josephine Baker used the discourse of "primitivist glamour" to discover "the costs and benefits of self-creation as beautiful object."[46] In these fashion spreads, the discursive production of blackness as glamorous re-positions the black body as primitive.

Finally, in "There's Only One Naomi," the iconic Campbell is displayed in a wealthy setting, in various sexualized poses. Extravagance has long been a defining feature of high fashion, "with couturiers fabricating spectacular fantasies of luxury for the upper echelons of society."[47] In one image, Campbell, surrounded by lavish jewels and trinkets, is posed atop an ornate desk. She wears no clothing; only Christian Louboutin black thigh-high boots, a chandelier necklace, a large white ring, diamond bracelets, and a black net to cover her face. Her purple jacket is casually placed upon a chair across from her (see Figure 9). Another image features Campbell perched on a large bed covered in fruit, desserts, and rose petals. Beside her on the ornate nightstand are more desserts, fruit, and candles. Campbell wears a black dress with sequins and feathers. One shoulder of the dress has fallen to expose one of her breasts. In her left hand, she holds a black fan with feathers. Her long, dark, straight hair covers the other side of her dress. She is looking directly at the camera, with her face slightly off-center. The image seems to connote opulence, gluttony, excess, wealth, waste, and

fetish. She is there to be consumed. Naomi's dress (and skin) are the only black items in the room, besides the bedpost. In the remaining images, Campbell dons black lingerie or appears to be in the state of undress, as her breasts are exposed in all but three images.

<Figure 9 here>

Naomi Campbell is the only model in this issue whose spread title identifies her by name. Naomi's "supermodel" status and wealth overshadow the complexities and anxieties of lesser-known black women. However, an effect of her naming is that the images carry with them Campbell's distinct biography. She cannot escape the fantastic stories about her anger-management challenges, stints in drug rehabilitation facilities, as well as her unwavering professionalism, remarkable figure, and her ineffable glamour. The significance of her identification and presentation in the spread also speaks to her iconic status as a black supermodel with a career in the industry lasting an unprecedented twenty years. As the designers Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana declared, Campbell is an "icon rather than a model."[48] Icons are discursive productions that are used as placeholders and help direct and distribute racial narratives. This means, as Selzer summarizes, that through circulation, iconicity "works to transform individuals into representatives of an imaginary type."[49] At the same time, because icons are exceptions, they exceed the rules that bind them.

Naomi is produced as an iconic, exceptional figure, so her presence in a stately mansion surrounded by various symbols of over the top wealth

does not appear unusual. Therefore, any claims that link her to the history of the denigrated black female body in the visual sphere can be disavowed. Naomi would qualify under what Imani Perry calls "Black American exceptionalism," which she says is "a popular narrative, a cultural practice, and an interpretive frame…that shapes individual experiences and shapes how we evaluate the racial inequality that we 'see' on our city streets, in our office buildings, on our television and movie screens, and in our new media."[50] Naomi Campbell is able to embody "an air of upper-class exclusivity and rarity," despite the "construction of non-white ethnicity as vulgar."[51] In this way, her status as a black icon enables her presence in the industry to be read as evidence that her (black) "look" is desirable, as Franca Sozzani proclaimed in a 2011 interview with *Huffington Post* editor Ariana Huffington. Nevertheless, the discourse of glamour links Campbell's black body – her partial nudity and sexualized poses – to privimitivism and directly references black female bodies as always-already eroticized.

Conclusion

"A Black Issue" calls for the recognition of black beauty and glamour that has either been unrecognized or hidden from public discourse. The symbols lodged within the images connote the disavowal of black difference and a commodified hypervisibility of blackness as an aestheticized, yet socially and politically insignificant classification. Moreover, difference is a place in which subjects are made. It is easy to be seduced by the images.

There is a particular affective register of seeing black bodies in a high fashion magazine – for black women, many connect with the excitement of their presence; we long to be (re)presented in a space of exclusion. The post-racial visual rhetoric is seductive – it highlights individual accomplishments as well as diversity and the "benefits" of explicit racial difference – a diversity that is obvious, visible, and recognizable.

The black model's body functions as a signifier of progress and change. Therefore, the fact that a relatively unknown black model like Arlenis Sosa, secured a lucrative cosmetics contract, and Jourdan Dunn was later featured on several magazine covers after the release of "A Black Issue" forestalls the possibility for explicit engagement on questions about the fashion system and the aesthetic logic upon which it depends as part of a racial and gender project. Instead, the production of the magazine offers false promises of significant or structural change in the aesthetic logic of industry and instead provides an abstract promotion of representation.

The efforts led by Hardison, et. al. advocating for the inclusion of more models of color on the runway and in high fashion magazines, coupled with the success of *Vogue* Italia's "A Black Issue" attempt to demonstrate the fashion industry's commitment to diversity and minority representation. Nevertheless, as I argue, "A Black Issue" reveals a more troubling and complex issue in the fashion industry's success in deploying race as a marketable aesthetic. Since the release of ABI, Franca Sozzani had been publicly supported by Bethann Hardison and Naomi Campbell, who both

spoke in favor of Sozzani against charges of racism. In January 2014, the "Business of Fashion" blog published an article by Jason Campbell accused Sozzani and the *Vogue* Italia website for segregating photographs of black models into a *Vogue* Black section. Sozzani launched the *Vogue* Black website in February 2010 with Hardison as the editor-at-large. She conferred with Hardison before producing the site.[52] Sozzani released a response to Jason Campbell's article on the *Vogue* Italia website resisting this charge and countering that sections like *Vogue* Black and *Vogue* Curvy are meant to celebrate difference. In this note, Sozzani also defended her level of racial sympathy by highlighting her commitment to young African designers, and by including words of support from her friends Hardison and Naomi Campbell, thereby "proving" that she cannot be racist.

The terms by which Bethann Hardison and her colleagues construct the exclusion of black models invites "A Black Issue" to be a perfect and natural rejoinder. As Foucault writes, where power exists, "there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."[53] I argue here that an industry discretely shaped by aesthetics, beauty, color, and bodies attempts to make race legible, while at the same time attempt to re-signify its significance by rendering dark bodies equivalent and interchangeable with white ones. "A Black Issue" is offered up as evidence that we are beyond the bounds of racism inasmuch as the individual black models who appear in the issue have achieved success in the high fashion industry (despite the presentation

of some as eroticized, sexualized, and primitivized visual subjects). Post-raciality is recognized here by presentation of blackness in image taken up by a white editor, photographer, elite fashion magazine (inspired by the visible presence of Obama and Oprah) rather than being directly tied to a black American political agenda – despite the activism introduced by Bethann Hardison and her contemporaries. Post-racialism, as it relates to the fashion industry, is a cultural logic squarely defined within a postmodern, multicultural, and universal society. Black bodies are produced as valuable – for its "'intensity of color' and physicality" – in the fashion market even though black female bodies are not valuable in a civil sense.[54] Post-racialism constructs black bodies as visible, visibility that proclaims the reality of post-raciality while at the same time visually affirming racial difference. As Dorinne Kondo argues, universality is too often "reified as the ultimate aesthetic goal, enshrining conventional notions of art as a transcendent realm apart from history, politics, and society."[55] This confluence has created an environment in which cultural difference is desirable, insofar as it is marketable.

Epilogue: Disruption

On February 9, 2014 Hood By Air (HBA) designer Shayne Oliver, a young black queer male designer of Trinidadian roots, put on a runway show highlighting his collection for Autumn/Winter 2014 New York Fashion Week. The show, which took place in New York City's expansive Chelsea Pier 60,

featured a diverse collection of male and female models donning headpieces adorned with blonde and brunette hair extensions, gray wigs, structured leather frocks, glossy lips, and painted faces. The show's booming music, models, and production resembled what Robin Givhan described as "a collision of moods and archetypes: urban warriors, androgynous street-toughs, and working-class people from around the neighborhood."[56] The dimly lit performance obscures the models' identities—they are not recognizable as black, white, brown, man, woman, gay, straight, etc. The show's climax and finale featured a series of five topless, male dancers in jeans and blond wigs. The spinning, vogueing performers posed, danced, and executed acrobatic vogue dips and impressive hair tosses as they crossed the runway and faced the mesmerized audience. The daring performance reflects the brand's radical fashion aesthetic—one that engages and deconstructs prevailing notions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and the erotic.

Hood By Air, created in 2006 by Oliver, his design partner Raul Lopez, is a provocative, Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) award-winning streetwear label derives inspiration from the New York club scene and pairs avant garde street couture with hip-hop and punk aesthetics.[57] The brand has been worn and heralded by several celebrities and fashion risk-takers, including Kanye West, Rihanna, Jay-Z, A$AP Rocky, and Drake. Using the label's association with hip-hop aesthetics and "urban" fashion, Oliver and his team resist recycling tropes of "ghetto" or "hood" fashion, and

instead create a luxury streetwear that ranges from quotidian sportswear separates to theatrical, unorthodox looks. Since its founding, HBA has upended convention and taken issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality head on. The brand is known for employing “street casting,” as opposed to go-sees and other traditional methods of selecting models that rely on agencies to find models. Institutional practices like go-sees have historically excluded models of color, while street casting allows for more opportunity to incorporate models representing different backgrounds. For the 2014 show, Oliver’s diverse collection of models represented multiple ethnicities and genders—including transgender performers, studs, and professional male and female models. The show offers a smorgasbord of visual stimuli that puts gender, race, class, and sexuality in conversation with one another. The brand challenges an aesthetic market that wants categorize clothing according to gender norms (womenswear and menswear), and at the same time disrupts constructs of beauty through sound, symmetry, and movement.

Oliver does not seem interested in explicitly engaging in commentary on norms of gender and sexuality. Instead, he activates a queer positionality by playing with “issues of status and power, insiders and outsiders, race, and gender roles,” as Robin Givhan notes.[58] His shows and garments are not mere spectacle, but a reclamation of power from the margins. Rather than aestheticizing blackness and difference, Oliver’s successful blurring of race, gender, class, and sexuality resists corporatization and is a refreshing

departure from an industry that markets and fetishizes diversity on the runway and in advertising campaigns—as “diversity” in this context conceals the complexity of difference. The HBA fashion aesthetic offers a clear representation of queer worldmaking as Oliver derives inspiration from his queer, diasporic identity. The show visually contextualizes the marginalization of queer of color difference, while concurrently resisting race, gender, class and sexual orders. Oliver’s visual aesthetic and brand ethos reflect an explicit queer of color critique that takes into account the cultural practices, politics of knowledge production, and identity construction used by queers of color. As Oliver explains, ideas for the brand’s authentic and very personal aesthetic “come to us by talking to each other and asking what matters to us most at that particular time”[59] HBA’s ultimate rejection of hegemonic, heteronormativity creates open space for an engaging, ruthless, and radical way of being.

[1]Notes

Sarah Mower, “Fashion World Stunned by Vogue for Black,” *The Observer*, July 28, 2008, accessed February 12, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/jul/27/fashion.pressandpublishing; Dodai Stewart, “Italia *Vogue*’s ‘All Black’ Issue: A Guided Tour,” *Jezebel*, July 14, 2008, accessed February 12, 2011, http://jezebel.com/5024967/italian-vogues-all-black-issue-a-guided-tour.

[2] Robin Givhan, “Fashion Statement,” *Washington Post*, November 24, 2010, accessed October 17, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/24/AR2010112407955.html?wprss=rss_print/style.

[3] See Cathy Horyn, “Conspicuous by Their Presence,” *New York Times*, June 19, 2008, Accessed February 12, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/19/fashion/19BLACK.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss; Jeff Israely, “*Vogue* Italia Is a Hit in Black,” *Time*, July 20, 2008, Accessed December 3, 2010, http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1828063,00.html; Winterbottom, Jo, “Vogue Italia’s Black Issue Spurred by Obama,” *Reuters*, July 23, 2008, Accessed December 2, 2010, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-vogue-idUSL23101967020080723

[4] African American writer, stylist, and former *Essence* magazine fashion and beauty editor, Michaela Angela Davis, coined the term “image activist” in the mid-2000s to address how black women were represented in hip-hop music videos. Her work as an image activist spread to multiple arenas, including fashion and reality television programming, as she challenges the absence and stereotypical representations of black women. I use the term “image activism” to include activities that challenge the lack of diversity and racial insensitivity in the fashion industry. Examples include calls by Davis and Somali supermodel, Iman, to boycott high-profile designers who do not hire black models.

[5] See Monica Miller *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Diasporic Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Krista Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); and Tanisha Ford, *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (Charlotte, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[6] Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

[7] Suzy Menkes, "Power to Women," *New York Times*, September 27, 2013, accessed September 27, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/28/fashion/Power-to-Women-Rick-Owens-and-Alber-Elbaz.html?_r=0&adxnnl=1&ref=suzymenkes&adxnnlx=1385237073-0D3jB0sOYzACkG9YyDFAlQ.

[8] Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 149.

[9] Quoted in "Skinny Model Furor. Not All Fashion's Fault, Say Designers, Editors; The Model Guidelines: Raising Eyebrows and Consciousness," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 30, 2007.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Guy Trebay, "Ignoring Diversity, Runways Fade to White," *New York Times*, October 14, 2007, accessed February 12, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/14/fashion/shows/14race.html?pagewanted=all&module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3Ar%2C%7B%222%22%3A%22RI%3A14%22%7D&_r=0.

[12] Ibid.

[13] See Ashley Mears, *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011); Elizabeth Wissinger, "Managing the Semiotics of Skin Tone: Race and Aesthetic Labor in the Fashion Modeling Industry," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 33, no. 1 (2012), 125-143.

[14] Stephanie Sadre-Orafai, "Casting 'Difference': Visual Anxiety and the New York Fashion Industry," (Ph.D. diss.. New York University, 2010);'" Wissinger, "Managing the Semiotics of Skin Tone."

[15] Wissinger, "Managing the Semiotics of Skin Tone," 139.

[16] Mears, *Pricing Beauty.*

[17] Mears, *Pricing Beauty*, 38.

[18] A 2010 documentary, *The Colour of Beauty*, exposes racism in the fashion industry as it focused on the challenges a Jamaican model faced while navigating the fashion world. As one agent in the documentary noted, agents rarely seek Black models, and when they are hired,

they must appear ethnically ambiguous or look like “white girls dipped in chocolate.”

[19] Kurt Soller, “Robin Givhan on Her New Book, Race, and Reviewing the Fashion Season.” *New York Magazine*, September 3, 2013 accessed September 3, 2013, http://nymag.com/thecut/2013/09/robin-givhan-on-jumping-back-into-fashion-week.html#.Uins8o4EwTk.email.

[20] Sadre-Orafai, “Casting ‘Difference.’”

[21] Rosemary Feitelberg, “Little Diversity in Fashion: African-Americans Bemoan Their Absence in Industry,” *Women’s Wear Daily,* September 17, 2007.

[22] Kenya Hunt, “The Great White Way,” *Metro*, September 5, 2007.

[23] Ibid.

[24] , Jess Cartner-Morely, “Jourdan Dunn Joins the Fashion Racial Diversity Debate,” *The Guardian*, September 20, 2013, Accessed September 23, 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/fashion/fashion-blog/2013/sep/20/jourdan-dunnfashion-racial-diversity-debate.

[25] Dorinne Kondo, *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[26] Mears, *Pricing Beauty* and Sadre-Orafai, “Casting ‘Difference.’”

[27] Joanne Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion: Markets and Value in Clothing and Modelling*, (London: Berg Publishing 2009); Mears, *Pricing Beauty*.

[28] Mears, *Pricing Beauty*. While Campbell was the first Black model to appear on the cover of French *Vogue*, British and American *Vogue* featured two black cover models, Donyale Luna and Beverly Johnson, in March 1966 and August 1974, respectively.

[29] “Fashion Scoops: Prada Give and Take…Singin’ in the Rain…,” *Women’s Wear Daily,* January 17, 2008, accessed October 17, 2011 http://www.wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-scoops/fashion-scoops-prada-give-take-singin-in-the-rain-470291.

[30] Feitelberg, “Little Diversity in Fashion: African-Americans Bemoan Their Absence in Industry;” Sadre-Orafai, “Casting ‘Difference.’”

[31] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 5.

[32] Kobena Mercer, “Ethnicity and internationality: New British Art and Diaspora–Based Blackness,” *Third Text* 13, no. 49 (1999): 56.

[33] Mercer, “Ethnicity and internationality: New British Art and Diaspora–Based Blackness,” 54.

[34]Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

[35] Representations of black femininity as excessive, hypersexual, productive can be most notably linked to imagery of Saartjie Baartman, also known as the Hottentot Venus, whose spectacularization points to the representation of the black female body as perverted and excessive in the public imagination. The spectral presence of Baartman can be linked to contemporary black female public figures like Nicki Minaj, Lil’ Kim, and Serena Williams whose bodies are always-already exposed, accessible, erotic, grotesque, and as Nicole Fleetwood observes, troubling to the field of vision. See Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*.

[36] Some examples include: *Vogue* Italia’s February 2011 “Black Allure” spread, *Harper Bazaar*’s March 2011 “What’s Bright Now” spread. Black models graced the covers of *Vogue* Germany in May 2009, *Vogue* Russia in December 2008 and April 2010, *i-D* in September 2008 and 2009, *Vogue* Australia in May 2012, and *Elle* Italia in January 2010

[37] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 3.

[38] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (Boston: South End Press, 1992): 168.

[39] Guy Trebay, “Dark Models Find Few Options,” *The Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 2003, accessed February 12, 2011, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2003-04-13/features/0304130160_1_estee-lauder-liya-kebede-aerin-lauder.

[40] Alessandra Raengo, “Optic Black: Blackness as Phantasmagoria,” in *Beyond Blackface: Africana Images in U.S. Media*, ed. A. Houston, (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2011): 159-177. Alessandra Raengo offers a compelling account of the relationship between blackface and the production of black subjects. According to Raengo, blackface “is an image *of* blackness *as* image of race. Its referent is not black people, but the epidermality of race, in other words, the fact that race’s scopic regime is built on the blackness of the skin” (2011:160). She sees the commodification of blackness in the entertainment industry as “historical ontology” that hooks contemporary material culture to relations of slavery. She

uses the film *Bamboozled* to illustrate that the commodity form in contemporary material culture is ontologically black.

[41] W.T. Lhamon, Jr., "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit," in *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, ed. H. Elam and J. Kennell, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 111-140; Raengo, "Optic Black: Blackness as Phantasmagoria."

[42] Andy Grundberg, "Irving Penn, Fashion Photographer, Is Dead at 92," *New York Times*, October 8, 2009, accessed November 3, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/08/arts/design/08penn.html.

[43] Janice Cheddie, "Politics of the First: The Emergence of the Black Model in the Civil Rights Era," *Fashion Theory* 6, no. 1 (2002), 65

[44] Mears, *Pricing Beauty*, 5.

[45] Cheddie, "Politics of the First," 66.

[46] Judith Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 132.

[47] Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 4.

[48] Guy Trebay, "Naomi Campbell: Model Citizen," *New York Times*, September 9, 2011 accessed September 9, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/09/fashion/09Gimlet.html.

[49] Linda F. Selzer, "Barack Obama, the 2008 Presidential Election, and the New Cosmopolitanism: Figuring the Black Body, *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 35, no. 4 (2010), 17.

[50] Imani Perry, *More Beautiful and More Terrible: The Embrace and Transcendence of Racial Equality in the United States,* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 131.

[51] Mears, *Pricing Beauty*, 196.

[52] Robin Givhan, "Fashion Statement," *Washington Post*, November 28, 2010, accessed October 17, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/24/AR2010112407955.html?wprss=rss_print/style.

[53] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 95.

[54] Cheddie, “Politics of the First,” 65.

[55] Kondo, *About Face*, 19.

[56]Robin Givhan, “Blurring Gender, Race, and Power Roles at Hood By Air,” *New York Magazine*, February 9, 2014, accessed August 27, 2015, http://nymag.com/thecut/2014/02/givhan-hood-by-air-blurs-gender-and-race.html.

[57] The label took a hiatus in 2009, while Oliver shifted his attention to hosting dance parties and Lopez started his own clothing line. Hood By Air was revamped by Oliver in 2012 with the help of filmmaker Leilah Weinraub.

[58] Givhan, “Blurring Gender, Race, and Power Roles at Hood By Air.”

[59] Robert Cordero, “The Image-Masters Behind Hood By Air,” *Business of Fashion*, September 11, 2015, accessed July 17, 2016, https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/the-image-masters-behind-hood-by-air.